

HAGGAI

introduction

1. Title. The title of the book is simply the name of the prophet who was its author. Haggai, Heb. *Chaggai*, means “festal,” or “festive,” probably suggesting that he was born on a feast day.

2. Authorship. Haggai was the first of the three postexilic Minor Prophets. Nothing is known of him other than what is revealed in his prophecy and what is said of him in the book of Ezra (Ezra 5:1; 6:14). Some believe he was so advanced in years when he delivered the prophecies of his book that he had seen the former Temple (see on Haggai 2:3). Whether or not that is so, Haggai may nevertheless be considered a link between the old and new Temples.

3. Historical Setting. When Cyrus the Great conquered Babylon (539 B.C.) he immediately instituted a policy of conciliation toward the religion of the conquered nation, even manifesting deference to the Babylonian god Marduk. This same general attitude of conciliation toward the religious feelings of the conquered peoples of his empire is shown in his decree permitting the return of the Jews and the rebuilding of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1–4). Taking advantage of this decree, a comparatively small group of exiles, under the leadership of Zerubbabel (or Sheshbazzar; see on Ezra 1:8), a descendant of David, returned to their homeland and shortly afterward laid the foundation of the Second Temple (Ezra 2:64; 3:1–10). All during the reigns of Cyrus and his successor, Cambyses, the enemies of the Jews endeavored to secure a royal edict to stop this work (Ezra 4:5). However, the Lord interposed in behalf of His people (see on Dan. 10:12, 13), and prevented these enemies from succeeding. The way thus remained open for the returned exiles to press forward in the reconstruction of the house of the Lord.

However, after such a promising start, work on the Second Temple gradually slowed down until it virtually ceased, owing mainly to the continued opposition and hindrance of the Samaritans (see Ezra 4:1–5). The discouraged exiles turned to working their own plots of land and to erecting living quarters for themselves. Little did those who mourned when the foundation of the Second Temple was laid (see on Ezra 3:12), realize how far their example would go in bringing discouragement to all who were endeavoring to restore the house of God.

After Cambyses came the short reign of the False Smerdis (in 522 B.C.). This proved a great setback for the returned exiles. Evidently the vengeful Samaritans finally succeeded in securing from this king, who was described by Darius as a destroyer of temples, a decree to stop the work at Jerusalem (see PK 572, 573). All these things led the returned exiles to declare that the proper time had not come for them to rebuild the Temple (see on Haggai 1:2). When the people halted the work on the house of God and turned their attention to their own dwellings and lands, the Lord visited them with a drought and confronted them with defeat in all their plans. For more than a year the Temple was entirely neglected. Meanwhile, the False Smerdis was killed by Darius, who took the throne and set aside the decrees of Smerdis.

It was to meet this deplorable situation of spiritual lethargy that the Lord raised up the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. Their messages of warning and reproof, of exhortation and encouragement, aroused the people to action, until finally work on the Temple was

resumed in the 2d year of Darius (Haggai 1:14, 15). It was only after the people had actually begun work again on the Temple, trusting in the protection of God, that Darius, a king who tried to emulate Cyrus in many ways, gave another official decree for the rebuilding of the Temple. This confirmed and strengthened the original decree of Cyrus (Ezra 5:3 to 6:13). Under the inspiring leadership of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, of the governor of the returned exiles, Zerubbabel, and of the high priest, Joshua (Ezra 5:1, 2; 6:14), the people moved forward with energy and zeal and completed the construction of the Temple in the 6th year of Darius (Ezra 6:15). Thus, from the standpoint of results immediately apparent, Haggai must be numbered among the most successful of prophets.

4. Theme. The four messages constituting the book of Haggai were calculated to arouse the flagging spirit of the people, to inspire them with the will to do great things for God. Haggai realized the importance of the Temple as the visible seat of God's presence and as the strong bond needed to hold the nation together in fidelity to the covenant and obedience to the Law. Haggai encouraged the returned exiles to bend every effort toward the rebuilding of the Temple.

In its entirety, the message of Haggai met with a more prompt and eager response on the part of both leaders and people than that of any other prophet. In contrast, that of Jeremiah was utterly and openly repudiated. Most of the prophets, in fact, encountered opposition ranging all the way from apathy through contempt to persecution. But Haggai stands forth as the most successful of the prophets, if immediate compliance with his message may be considered the measure of a prophet's success. The noble example of leaders and people is eminently worthy of emulation today.

It was the spirit of hearty cooperation that led, within a remarkably short time, to the completion of the Lord's house. The same spirit will, in our day, lead to the completion of the spiritual house of God and to the establishment of His eternal kingdom (1 Peter 2:5; cf. Matt. 24:14). Had the spirit manifested by the Jews in Haggai's day continued, the glorious promises made to the fathers by the prophets would soon have met their fulfillment and Messiah would have come (PK 703, 704) and died and begun His eternal reign (see Vol. IV, pp. 27–32). Haggai's message to the church today is not only one of warning and admonition but also one of great encouragement.

5. Outline.

- I. The First Message of Haggai, 1:1–15.
 - A. Indifference reproved, 1:1–6.
 - B. The reason for the drought, 1:7–11.
 - C. Response of the people to the prophet's message, 1:12–15.
- II. The Second Message of Haggai, 2:1–9.
 - A. Those grieving over former Temple comforted, 2:1–5.
 - B. The glory of the new Temple will surpass that of the former Temple, 2:6–9.
- III. The Third Message of Haggai, 2:10–19.
 - A. Religious formalism insufficient, 2:10–14.
 - B. The people must obey in order to receive the blessings of God, 2:15–19.
- IV. The Fourth Message of Haggai, 2:20–23.
 - A. The overthrow of nations opposing God, 2:20–22.
 - B. A personal promise to Zerubbabel, 2:23.

CHAPTER 1

1 Haggai reproveth the people for neglecting the building of the house. 7 He inciteth them to the building. 12 He promiseth God's assistance to them being forward.

1. Darius. The 2d year of Darius Hystaspes was 520/519 B.C. by either type of calendar year—beginning in the spring or in the fall (see Vol. III, pp. 98, 99).

Sixth month. That is, Elul, the Hebrew month beginning in August or September (see Vol. II, p. 116).

First day. The day of the feast of the new moon (see on Num. 28:11, 14), an appropriate time to urge the building of the Temple (for the dating, see on v. 15).

Zerubbabel. See Ezra 3:8. He was also known as Sheshbazzar (see on Ezra 1:8).

Governor. Heb. *pachah*, “a subordinate governor,” one who was under a satrap. Though Zerubbabel, a member of the house of David, had the political headship of Judah, he possessed it only as the deputy of an alien ruler.

Joshua. His father was taken captive to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar (see on 1 Chron. 6:15). The prophet Zechariah, a contemporary of Haggai, frequently mentions Joshua (Zech. 3; 6:11). The parentage of Zerubbabel and Joshua is probably given by way of setting forth their right to positions of authority, as descendants of David and Aaron respectively.

2. Lord of hosts. See on Jer. 7:3.

Time that. The people advanced this false argument for their failure to accomplish the rebuilding of the Temple. They apparently misinterpreted the 70-year prophecy of Jeremiah, saying that the period of captivity had not been fully accomplished. Evidently they claimed to be waiting for the completion of 70 years from the destruction of the Temple in 587/586 B.C. (see Vol. III, pp. 99, 100), a period which would end in 518/517, a time somewhat later than that of these messages (520/519 B.C.; see on v. 1). The difficulties they encountered, which hindered their rebuilding of the Temple, they declared to be in the nature of a reproof of God for their premature haste. But the very fact that Darius had set aside the prohibition of Smerdis the usurper for the building of the Temple (see p. 1074) should have given the Jews every incentive to resume work on the house of the Lord (see EGW, Supplementary Material on Haggai 1:2).

3. Word of the Lord. See on Zeph. 1:1.

The prophet. Both Haggai and his contemporary Zechariah refer to themselves as prophets (Zech. 1:1; see on Hab. 1:1).

4. Is it time? God rebukes the Jews for allowing their comfortable living in well-appointed houses to blind them to the need of rebuilding the Temple. How often men are alert to their own material needs and blind to their spiritual needs and to the needs of God's work on earth. So long as men postpone the building of the Lord's spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5), so long will its completion be delayed.

Cieled. From the Heb. *saphan*, “to cover in,” or “to panel [with wood]” (see Jer. 22:13–15).

5. Lord of hosts. See on Jer. 7:3.

Consider. The Lord ever appeals to serious thought and reason on the part of man (see on Isa. 1:18).

6. Sown much. The labors of the people during the preceding drought yielded scant returns because God withheld His blessing (see Haggai 2:15–17; cf. Deut. 28:38–47; Prov. 11:24).

Bag with holes. A striking figure of the lack of prosperity which Judah suffered because the people were not zealous in the Lord's service. Such is the inevitable result of a materialistic philosophy of life. For comment on the relative value of spiritual and material things and the importance of making first things first see on Matt. 6:24–34; 19:21, 22.

7. Consider. A second divine appeal (see v. 5) to arouse the people from their sinfully indifferent attitude (see on Isa. 1:18).

8. Mountain. Perhaps this refers to the hill country near Jerusalem, possibly to the "king's forest" (see on Neh. 2:8), where timber could be quickly procured.

9. Looked for much. Evidently the returning exiles had high hopes of peace and prosperity upon their return to Judah, and were ill prepared for the hardships that faced them.

Why? Pointedly the people are told that the failure of their crops is not due to natural causes only, but to the God who controls the forces of nature, to Him whose "house" they had neglected.

Run. An idiom indicating the eagerness and haste with which the Jews were building spacious and comfortable homes for themselves.

10. Stayed. The drought was so severe that even the dew was withheld.

11. I called for. The prophet desires to make clear that this drought was not merely from natural causes, but was brought by God to show the people the error of their ways.

Corn. That is, "grain," or "cereals," of all kinds.

12. Remnant. Only a comparatively small number of exiles returned to Judah (see on Ezra 2:64).

Obeded. Haggai's appeal was effective (vs. 12–15), and the work of restoration was diligently undertaken.

13. Messenger. Heb. *mal'ak*, often a human messenger; *mal'ak* is also the usual word for "angel" in the OT. Haggai speaks of himself, as does no other prophet, as "the Lord's messenger" (see on Mal. 1:1).

I am with you. Their repentance is accepted, and God pledges His protection (see Ps. 23:4; 91:15; Isa. 43:2). As soon as the people decided to obey the Lord, the messages of reproof were replaced by words of encouragement. The assurance of the presence of God with the people gave them promise of all other blessings, for these are certain to accompany God's presence.

14. Governor of Judah. See on v. 1.

Remnant. See on v. 12.

Did work. Literally, "worked work," or "made work". The people were stirred to action, and gave heed to the messages of the Lord. The inspiration brought by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah was a mighty incentive to the leaders of Judah to begin work, and they responded to the call by beginning to build, "the prophets of God helping them" (Ezra 5:1, 2).

The Lord of hosts. See on Jer. 7:3.

15. Four and twentieth day. The preceding message of Haggai had been given on the "first day of the month" (v. 1). Considering the time necessary for planning and gathering materials, the response of the people of Jerusalem and Judah was prompt indeed.

Sixth month. See on v. 1. The second year of Darius was 520/519 B.C., by either fall or spring reckoning (see Vol. III, p. 99). But if Haggai reckoned it by the Jewish civil

calendar year, beginning with the 7th month, in the autumn (see Vol. II, pp. 109, 110, 116), “the sixth month” would come in 519; whereas in a spring-beginning calendar year the 6th month would be in 520. If Haggai’s statement that reconstruction began in the “second” year of Darius is equated with Ezra’s statement that work on the Temple was halted until the “second” year of Darius (ch. 4:24), and if Ezra was employing a fall-to-fall reckoning for the year (see Vol. II, pp. 109–121; Vol. III, pp. 101–107; see also S. H. Horn and L. H. Wood, *The Chronology of Ezra 7*, rev. ed., 1970), then it must be concluded that Haggai employed a fall reckoning.

However, the use of a fall-beginning year would mean that the text presents the messages of Haggai out of chronological order, an arrangement which, although not at all impossible, and not unknown elsewhere in the Bible (cf. Additional Note on Ezra 4), is believed by most commentators to be contrary to the force of the contents of the prophet’s messages. For this reason it is almost universally held that Haggai employed a spring reckoning; and in that case the 24th day of the 6th month in the 2d year of Darius would be approximately Sept. 21, 520 B.C. (see Vol. III, p. 99).

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1–15CS 261; PP 527–529; 6T 458

2 PK 573; 5T 269

4 5T 269

4–6PK 574; PP 527

5–10Ed 143

7, 8 PK 575

9–11PK 574; PP 527

12–14PK 575

CHAPTER 2

1 *He encourageth the people to the work, by promise of greater glory to the second temple than was in the first.* 10 *In the type of holy things and unclean he sheweth their sins hindered the work.* 20 *God’s promise to Zerubbabel.*

1. Seventh month. That is, Tishri, the Hebrew month beginning in September or October (see Vol. II, p. 116).

2. Residue. Or, “remnant.” The same Hebrew word, *she’erith*, is used here and in ch. 1:12, 14.

3. Who is left? Since not quite 70 years (see on ch. 1:2) had elapsed since the destruction of the Temple, it is quite possible that some of the older people present had seen the former Temple in their childhood. Some commentators think that Haggai himself was old enough to have seen it. The difference between the magnificent “glory” of Solomon’s Temple and the disappointing appearance of this building must have brought deep sorrow to the people, such as they had felt at the laying of the foundation 15 years earlier (Ezra 3:11–13).

Nothing. Josephus states that the Second Temple was only half as high as Solomon’s Temple, and in many ways inferior to it (*Antiquities* viii. 3. 2; xv. 11. 1). However, the chief difference was not in size but in splendor of appearance and rich adornments of gold and precious stones.

4. Be strong. These words of encouragement were uttered three times for emphasis (cf. four times in Joshua 1:6, 7, 9, 18).

I am with you. See on ch. 1:13.

5. Covenanted. The Lord had pledged that He would be with His people (Ex. 29:45).

Out of Egypt. The children of Israel had always considered the deliverance from Egypt an outstanding event (see on Amos 2:10).

Spirit. God here gave the people the assurance that His Holy Spirit would abide with them (see PK 576).

6. Lord of hosts. See on Jer. 7:3.

Yet once. Or, “once again.” That the people might learn to accept and value highly the Second Temple, Haggai predicts that in the future its glory will greatly surpass that of Solomon’s Temple. By the use of the word “yet” or “again,” the prophet refers back to previous manifestations of God’s power, including probably the shaking of the earth in connection with the giving of the law on Mt. Sinai (see on Ps. 68:7, 8).

7. All nations. Since the prophet is here concerned with the first advent of our Lord, this is probably a reference to the fall of nations and empires that took place after Haggai’s time (see vs. 21, 22).

Desire. Heb. *chemdah*, from *chamad*, “to desire.” The “desire of all nations” came to the Second Temple—built by Zerubbabel and later rebuilt by Herod the Great—when Christ taught and healed in its precincts.

Shall come. This verb is plural in the Hebrew, whereas its subject, *chemdah* (see above), is in the singular. Some translators have changed *chemdah*, “desire,” into *chamudoth*, “desirable things,” or “treasures,” in order that the subject might agree with the plural verb. However, this destroys the time-honored Messianic import of this passage. If it is necessary to make a change in the Hebrew in order to secure agreement between subject and predicate, the context would suggest that the verb be made singular to agree with the subject, *chemdah*.

Fill this house. This was fulfilled when Christ came to the Temple (see Mal. 3:1; John 2:13–16). The Temple to which Christ came has often been called Herod’s Temple (see on Luke 3:1; John 2:20; GC 23, 24). In later times, and even today, the Jews commonly refer to Solomon’s Temple as the First Temple, and to the Temple from its rebuilding under Zerubbabel to its desolation in A.D. 70 as the Second Temple.

8. Silver. God does not ask men to give Him offerings because He needs money, but in order that they may receive a blessing from giving and develop a character like His (see DA 20, 21). “Continual giving starves covetousness to death” (3T 548). From the Jews in Haggai’s day we may learn the lesson that God cannot bless those who fail to render Him that which is needed in His service (see ch. 1:5–11).

9. Glory. Because of the presence of Christ the “glory” of the Second Temple (see on v. 7) was “greater” than that of the former. The Second Temple was honored with the living presence of One in whom “dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Col. 2:9). For a discussion of God’s purpose for the Jews following their return from captivity see pp. 27–30.

Peace. The presence of “the Prince of Peace” would bring to mankind all the blessings that accompany peace (see on Jer. 6:14). The announcement of the birth of Jesus, made by the angelic host to the shepherds of Bethlehem, was a message of peace: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:14).

10. Ninth month. That is, Kislev, the Hebrew month beginning in November or December (see Vol. II, p. 116). The 24th day of this month would be approximately Dec. 18, 520 B.C. (see Vol. III, p. 99).

11. Lord of hosts. See on Jer. 7:3.

Ask. It was the appointed duty of the priests to teach the people all God's requirements (see on 2 Chron. 15:3). Consequently a reply by the priests would be considered authoritative.

12. Holy flesh. That is, the flesh of certain animal sacrifices (see on Lev. 6:25).

No. That which touched the "holy flesh" was to be holy (see Lev. 6:27), but the garment of one carrying holy flesh could not communicate its sacredness to anything else.

13. Unclean. Serious ceremonial uncleanness came from contact with a dead body (see Num. 19:11). Everything that the polluted person touched became unclean.

14. So is this people. The prophet here gives the interpretation of vs. 11–13. Not only the exiles themselves, but also everything to which they put their hands brought the divine curse instead of the divine blessing. Their disobedience in not building the Lord's house was their pollution. This message is definitely a reproof for the previous action of the people.

They offer. Evidently this refers to the altar the exiles had constructed when they first returned (see Ezra 3:2). Following the analogy of Haggai 2:12, it is plain that the holy altar did not, and could not, sanctify the unholy actions of the worshipers.

15. From this day. That is, from the time mentioned in vs. 10, 18.

Upward. Or, "onward." Haggai evidently desired the people to "consider" what would happen in the light of what had happened "before."

Before a stone was laid. Either, "before a stone had been laid," or "before a stone has been laid." Probably a reference to the building of the main Temple structure rather than to the laying of the Temple foundation.

16. Measures. This word is found in the LXX, not in the Hebrew. The "heaps" were of grain, which, when threshed, yielded only half of what the people expected. This harvest shortage represented the chastisement of God upon the people because of their negligence.

Pressfat. Heb. *yeqeb*, a press for wine or oil. Usually this consisted of two cavities in stone or in the ground, an upper one, in which the grapes or olives were pressed, connected by a channel to the lower one, in which the wine or oil was collected.

Vessels. The prophet had in mind the yield of oil or wine, which would be measured in one of the common Hebrew liquid measures such as the "bath" (see Vol. I, pp. 166, 167). The KJV translators appear to have supplied the word "vessels" to avoid a more specific term.

Press. Heb. *purah*, the lower trough of the wine or oil press in which the liquid collected.

17. Smote. God Himself punished His people (see on Deut. 28:22; Amos 4:9). The "blasting" and the "mildew" blighted the corn; the "hail" destroyed the vines (see Ps. 78:47).

18. Consider now. In the Hebrew this verse is rightly divided, grammatically, into two parts. In the first the prophet calls on the people to "consider"—to note with care—what would happen from that day onward. In the second he asks them to "consider" from

the day of the laying of the foundation of the Temple and onward. Most commentators agree that these two “days” are one and the same.

19. Seed. In other words, “Is your ‘seed’ grain [see Job 39:12], which you have saved for planting next year’s crops, still in the ‘barn,’ or has it already been eaten because of the shortage of food resulting from the drought?”

Yea, as yet. Though there was no sign of growth or sprouting by which to predict what the yield would be, Haggai forecasts an abundance (see Deut. 28:2, 3).

Not brought forth. It seems evident that the drought (see Haggai 1:9, 10) still prevailed at the time this message was given. Normally, the rainy season would have begun one to two months earlier (see Vol. II, p. 110).

This day. That is, the day of their obedience.

20. And again. The book closes with a promise of restoration for the house of David under the leadership of Zerubbabel (vs. 21–23).

Four and twentieth day. See on v. 10. Although the month is not here stated, it is reasonable to assume that it is the same as the month of the prophet’s message immediately preceding. It is generally held that this message was delivered on the same day as the message of vs. 10–19.

21. Shake. See on vs. 6, 7.

22. Overthrow. The Lord here represents Himself as exercising His authority over all the nations of the earth that set themselves up to oppose His purposes.

23. Signet. Heb. *chotham*, a “seal,” or “a seal ring”; regarded as an object of great importance, authority, and value (see on Jer. 22:24). These wonderful words of promise to Zerubbabel should bring encouragement to all of God’s children. “God will not suffer one of His truehearted workers to be left alone to struggle against great odds and be overcome. He preserves as a precious jewel everyone whose life is hid with Christ in God. Of every such an one He says: ‘I ... will make thee as a signet: for I have chosen thee’” (7T 67).

Lord of hosts. See on Jer. 7:3. These words of promise are spoken by the Commander of the armies of the universe, an assurance that His promises will be fulfilled.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

- 3 GC 24
- 4 PK 575, 576, 577
- 7 DA 52, 187; GC 23, 24; PK 577, 597, 697
- 8 AA 519; ChS 168; CS 188, 224, 261, 262, 303; MH 502; PP 525; TM 177, 198; 2T 652; 3T 549; 4T 78, 458, 473; 6T 102; 9T 255; WM 279, 280, 281
- 9 PK 597
- 16 Ed 143
- 16–19PP 527
- 19, 23 PK 577
- 23 MH 488; 7T 67

¹Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Hag 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.